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"Strangers on a Bridge" - A Review*

Since 1957 Jim Donovan has led a busy life, even for him. He has, at the request of the Brooklyn Bar Association and the United States District Court, defended the Russian spy, Colonel Rudolph Ivanovich Abel, in the United States District Court for the Eastern District, the Court of Appeals, and in two hearings before the Supreme Court of the United States. He negotiated the exchange of Abel for the Americans, Gary Powers and Frederic L. Pryor. He then was asked by the President to negotiate the release of 9700 Cuban victims of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, and during these negotiations was engaged in a tough campaign for the United States Senate. At the present time, and a difficult time it is, Jim is President of the Board of Education.

In "Strangers on a Bridge" Jim tells the story of the Abel trial and Abel's subsequent release in exchange for the release of Powers and Pryor. The book is a fascinating narrative of the way a skillful lawyer skillfully defends his client. The client, of course, was about as unpopular a client as one could find without looking for him. The trial in the District Court was before a judge who was meticulous in protecting the rights of the government. Jim has no criticism of this, only praise.

The book is also an absorbing cloak and dagger story of intricate negotiations leading to the celebrated exchange on the Glienicker Bridge. In these negotiations, which were at times a severe ordeal for him, Jim did not have the comfort of James Bond's weapons or Bond's women. Surmounting these handicaps, he was successful and earned a glowing commendation from President Kennedy.

Quite apart from being an exciting book, "Strangers on a Bridge" is a heartening reaffirmation of the lawyer's duty to undertake, even at great personal sacrifice, the defense of the defenseless. Jim has merited well the encomiums he has received from judges and lawyers everywhere, and he is quite willing to share them with his two able assistants, Arnold Fraiman and Thomas M. Debevoise.

During the long discouraging days of the Abel trial, Jim's wife once wistfully remarked that she wished her husband could find some nice, quiet, paying clients among the people of his home borough of Brooklyn. When he became President of the Board of Education, he found a great many clients not only in Brooklyn but also in the other four boroughs—the school kids of New York City. He is giving these clients the same kind of selfless representation that he gave to Abel. It would be nice if some of his more strident critics in the difficult problems he faces as President of the School Board would take time off from organizing boycotts to read his book. They would be surprised to learn that he has been usefully occupied with the cause of civil rights and freedom.

P.B.D.

* Donovan, James B., *Strangers on a Bridge*, New York, Atheneum, 1964, XI + 432 pages.